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# Some Notes on Shakespeare's Stage and Plays

BY

WILLIAM POEL

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE SOCIETY

*Reprinted from "The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library"*

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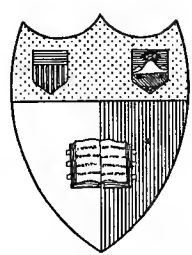
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BY

**WILLIAM POEL**

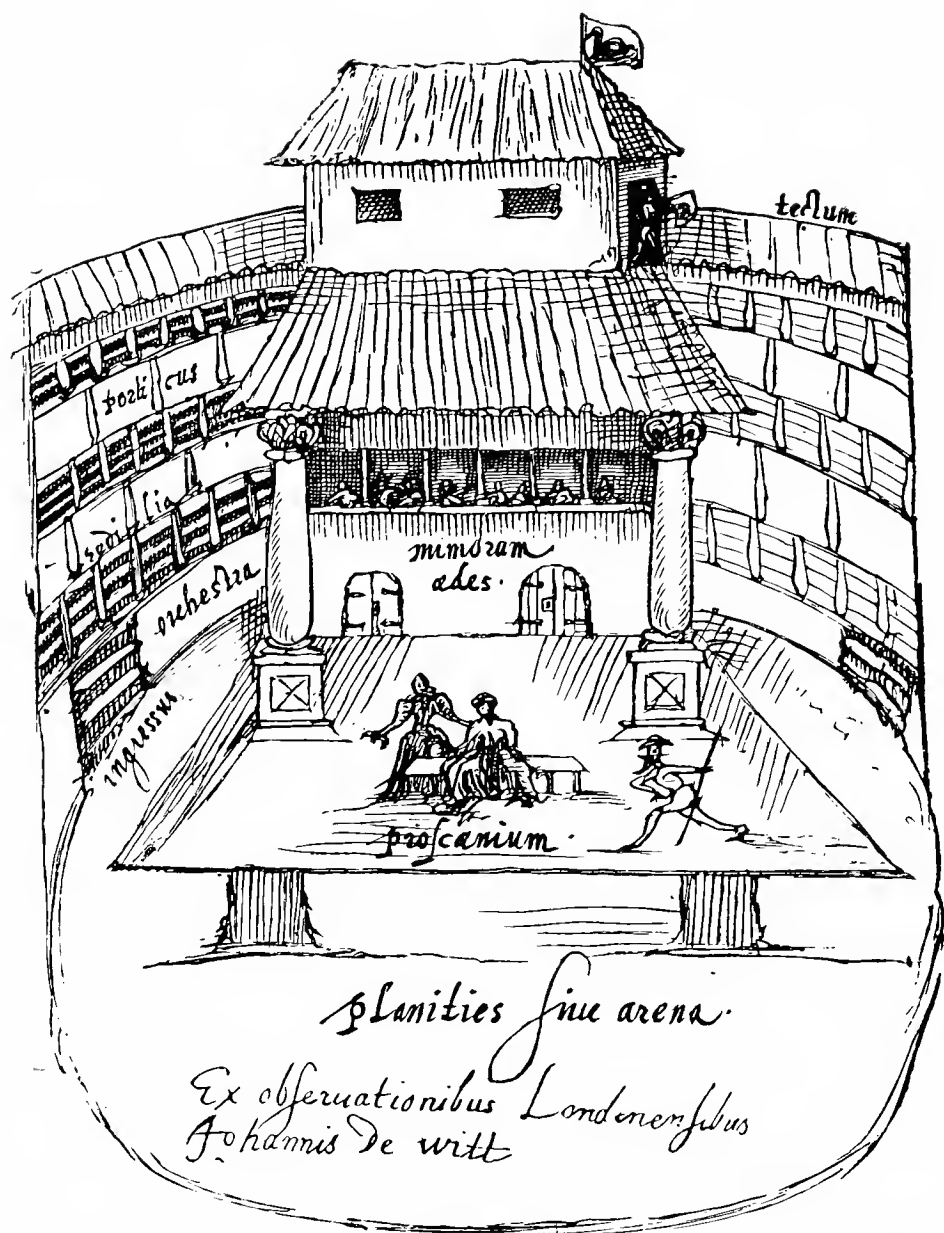
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THE SWAN THEATRE.

## SOME NOTES ON SHAKESPEARE'S STAGE AND PLAYS.

By WILLIAM POEL.

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE SOCIETY.

*A wooden dagger is a dagger of wood,  
Nor gold nor ivory haft can make it good . . .  
Or to make boards to speak ! There is a task !  
Painting and carpentry are the soul of masque.  
Pack with your peddling poetry to the stage,  
This is the money-got mechanic age !*

—BEN JONSON.

THE Elizabethan drama was written for the Elizabethan stage. When the Elizabethan stage disappeared it became no longer possible to produce Elizabethan drama, for the dramatic construction of plays of that period was to a great extent dependent upon the form of the theatre, which had very special features. The first playhouse was built in 1576, and the last of its kind had disappeared before the Great Fire of 1666, and it had ceased to be used as a playhouse from the early days of the Civil War. Thus the Elizabethan playhouse was in use for a period of a little over fifty years, and had a unique existence in the history of the stage. Original in design, it was unlike any other building of the kind built before or after, so much so that it excited the notice of foreigners visiting this country as something quite unknown out of England. The peculiarities of its construction were due to the fact that English drama sprang from the entertainments of the people, and not from those of the Court, taking its form uninfluenced by the plays of Greece or Rome. It was shaped by the popular entertainments known as Mysteries, Moralities, Interludes, Bear-baitings, Wit-combats, Sword-combats, Street Pageants and Shows, all of which nourished the dramatic tastes of the people in a direction peculiarly its own. As a consequence, there exists nothing in the construction of the Elizabethan playhouse sugges-

tive of the Greek or Roman stage ; it embodies the varied conditions under which the public exhibitions of the day were given.

For centuries the people had been accustomed to dramatic entertainments illustrating incidents from Scripture history and legends of the Church. These were performed without break or pause in the action from beginning to end, while at the same time they were devoid of plot and dramatic sequence ; yet this very failing gave the construction of Elizabethan drama its special character which, with one or two notable exceptions, was never characterized by skill in the development of the story. While on the other hand, the popular support of amusements that were merely a series of loosely connected incidents encouraged poet-dramatists to adopt a liberty in treatment and variety of subject altogether forbidden in classical drama.

The ascendancy of the native drama determined those playwrights who, while scholars, were yet men of the world, and deeply imbued with the spirit of the nation and of the age, to abandon the classical form of play and model their work upon that which public taste demanded. These brought their classical learning to bear upon the popular plays, and, while retaining the freedom of treatment allowed in them, aimed at greater coherency and stronger characterization. Yet Elizabethan drama would still have remained indistinctive but for the genius of Marlowe, who, seeing the possibilities that were presented in the people's drama, transfigured and recreated its form of expression so that it became a means of inspiration for future poets. And among others to Shakespeare, who gave unity of design and a continuity of interest that was planned on a philosophical basis, thus securing for Elizabethan drama a fame as great as that achieved by the Greek dramatists.

Naturally, there were scholars of the day who still preferred the classical imitations represented at Court to the popular play, upon which they were apt to look with contempt, as " neither right tragedies, nor right comedies " ; and undoubtedly among these must be numbered Ben Jonson, who, while conforming to the construction of the native drama, aimed at restoring it to classical form, and was able to a great extent to re-establish in his own comedies the Latin form.

With the Restoration and the re-opening of the theatre there was no longer any national dramatic taste ; and the theatre, as an amusement, was supported mainly by Town and Fashion, influenced

by the Court. As a consequence, the Elizabethan playhouse was replaced by the proscenium, act-drop, and scene-cloth which had been introduced at Court by Inigo Jones during the reign of Charles I. From this period onward the stage has continued to represent plays more or less written on the classical model, and divided into acts and scenes. But the new form of theatre made no longer possible the proper representation of Elizabethan drama.

To understand the principle upon which the first Elizabethan playhouse was constructed it is necessary to remember what were the conditions under which dramatic and other entertainments were previously given, and to realize that it was English custom and tradition, alone which guided the Elizabethan actors in designing its structure.

The most notable feature of the Elizabethan playhouse is undoubtedly the platform which was built out into the middle of the auditorium, having a space on three sides of it to accommodate the spectators. By the uninitiated it will not be readily conceived how absolutely the construction of Elizabethan drama depended upon this particular feature, and it is therefore of some interest to inquire from whence the actors derived the idea of thus bringing out the platform into the middle of the auditorium. There is no doubt that this was taken from the mediæval custom of presenting plays on a platform in the midst of the market-square, or other open space, so that the performance could be seen from all sides; and it is evident that in the innyards, where plays were given before the first playhouse was built, the stage, though not actually in the middle of the yard, was built out from one of the walls, and open to the spectators from three sides. It is easy, then, to understand that, in building their first playhouse, the actors were only following the usage familiar to the people.

Perhaps the next most noticeable feature in the Elizabethan playhouse is the position of the pillars carrying the roof, or "heaven" as it was called. This possibly answered the same purpose as the sounding-board over a cathedral pulpit. Between the two pillars in front, the form of which differs in no way from that of those which supported the balcony in the innyard, ran the traverse, or small curtain, which was used occasionally to shut from view the rear part of the stage. In the innyard also originated the custom of using a balcony

for the characters to speak from, when they were supposed to be addressing the audience from "above".

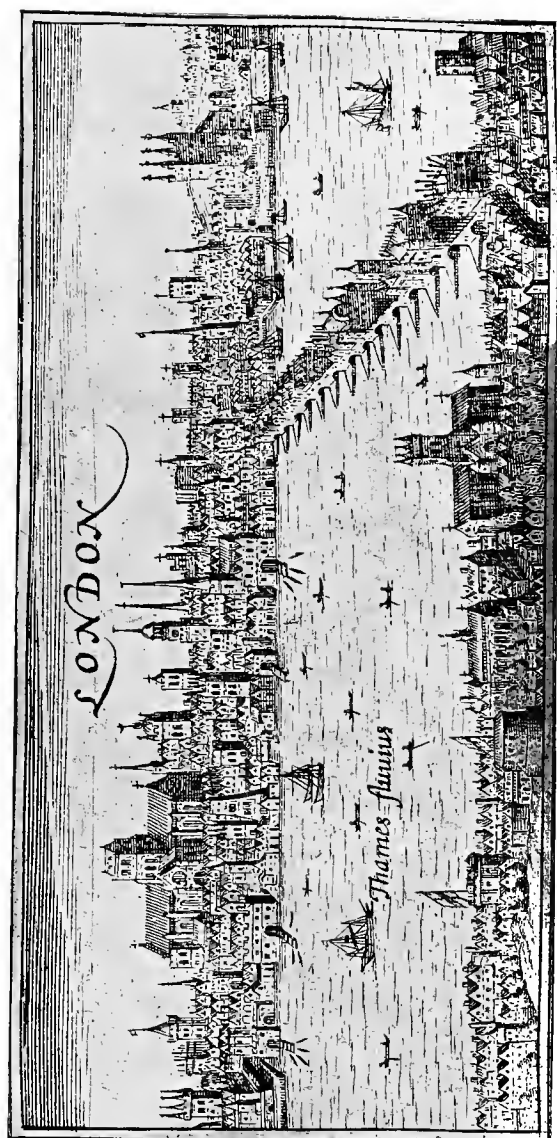
The two doors at the back of the stage, which also had important influence on the dramatic construction of Elizabethan drama, were obviously suggested by the conditions of acting in the banqueting halls of noblemen's mansions, at the one end of which was usually a gallery with two doors beneath. All those who are familiar with the dining halls of Gray's Inn or the Middle Temple, where Shakespeare's plays were acted, will understand.

It only remains now to account for the circular form of the first playhouse, which a glance at the bear-baiting "rings" that existed on the Bankside will explain. In the "Theatre" there were three tiers of galleries instead of one.

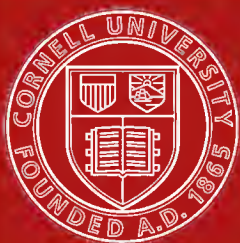
The history of the building of the first playhouse, which was constructed by the father of the great actor, Richard Burbage, is one specially interesting to the Shakespearian student, from the fact that the same building was removed from its original site at Shoreditch to the Surrey side of the river, and re-erected in the same circular shape within a few yards of the still existing cathedral Church of St. Saviour. This playhouse became known as the famous "Globe". It was destroyed by fire in 1613. The only known representation of it in existence is the round building shown in the view by Hollar of 1610.

For details of the "Globe" playhouse we have to turn to another theatre called the "Fortune". Although probably larger in dimensions than the "Globe," and square instead of round, it had many features in common with its more famous rival. The contract for the "Fortune" stipulates for the erection of a building of four equal external sides of 80 feet reduced by necessary arrangements to an internal area of 55 feet square. The length of the stage from side to side was to be 43 feet, and in depth it was to extend over half the space of the internal area. Three tiers of galleries occupied three sides of the house; the height of the first from the ground is not named; the second is stated as being 12 feet above the lower tier; the third 11 feet from the second, and the height above the third 9 feet. There were four "convenient rooms," or what are now called boxes, for the accommodation of musicians, and the





HOLLAR'S VIEW OF LONDON, 1610.



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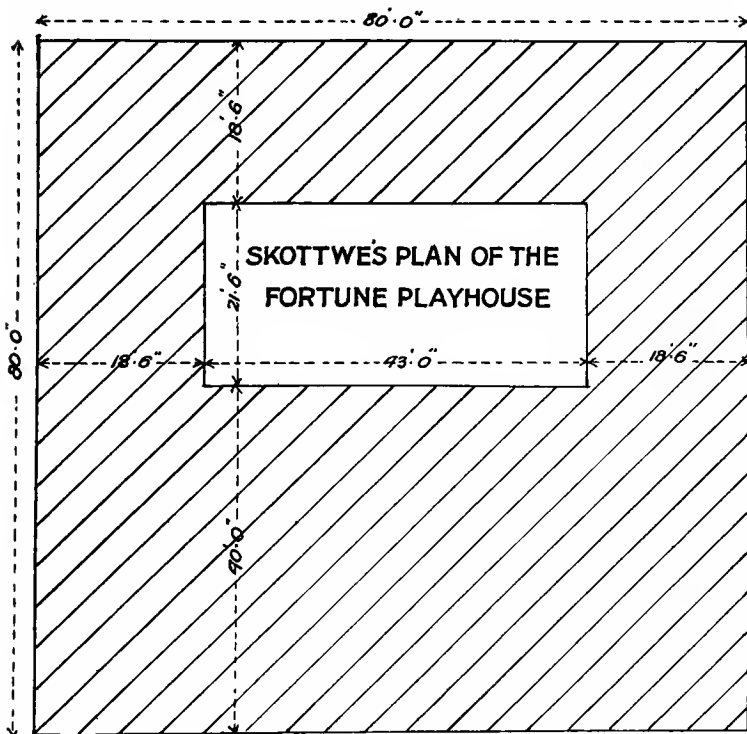
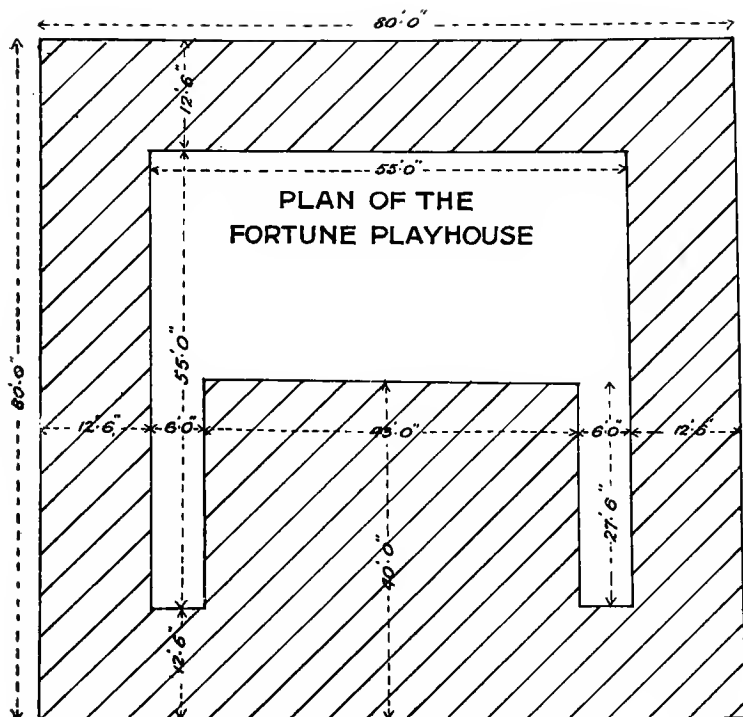
well-to-do citizens, partitioned off from the lower gallery, with rooms of similar dimensions for distinguished visitors in the upper galleries. The depth of the lower galleries measured  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the back to the front, the upper stories had an additional projection of 10 inches. The space between the external wall of the playhouse and the front of the galleries was completely roofed in with tiles (the "Globe" had a thatch roof) as was also that part of the stage occupied by the actors, and known as the "tyring house," meaning the house of attire, whilst the open area, or pit, was exposed to the air. The foundation of the building was brick and projected a foot above the ground; the rest was constructed of timber, filled in with lath and plaster. The "tyring house" had glazed windows, and the cost of this building including the tiles, the seats, and everything except the painting, of which probably there was not much, was estimated at £440, a sum equivalent in modern money to about £2500.

This builder's contract for erecting the "Fortune" playhouse has existed at Dulwich Library since the death of Edward Alleyn, the principal owner of the property, and it is curious that only one attempt has been made in modern times to reconstruct on paper the form of a building which so little resembled the modern theatre. The effort was not a very successful one. In 1824 a Mr. Skottowe wrote a life of Shakespeare in which appeared a plan of the "Fortune," and referring to Alleyn's contract he writes: "I do not profess to understand it, it is in fact inconsistent with itself. A square of 80 feet, everywhere reduced on each side by galleries of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet in depth, would certainly leave a square area of 55 feet. But as the stage would necessarily occupy one side of the square, and the depth of the stage was to extend exactly to the centre, that is to say, to take up half of the remaining area, nothing like the area spoken of could be left open. Again the length of the stage is expressly defined, 43 feet, which leaves it 6 feet too short at each side to form a junction with the ends of the galleries next the stage. I have no doubt, therefore," continues Mr. Skottowe, "of an error in the document, which I take to be the omission to calculate the space occupied by the passages and staircases. A passage of 6 feet wide behind the galleries added to this width would make a reduction of  $18\frac{1}{2}$  feet from each side of the theatre, and leave a space between the front of one gallery to the front of the other of 43 feet, which is the exact width

assigned to the platform." Here, then, it is obvious that Mr. Skot-towe failed to realize that in Shakespeare's time the actors performed at the public theatres on an open platform that projected as far as the middle of the pit.

It is evident, also, that on this open platform there was no means of erecting any scenery, otherwise the audience seated in the galleries nearest to the stage would have had its view of the actors obstructed ; nor in Shakespeare's plays is there a hint in the stage directions that there must be any change made in the mechanical arrangement of the stage to indicate the "place where". "What child is there," asks Sir Philip Sidney in his "Apology of Poetry" written about 1583, "that, coming to a play, and seeing 'Thebes' written in great letters on an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes?" Apparently, then, the name of the country, where the action of the play took place, was posted upon some door—perhaps the entrance door to the theatre ;—the bill of the play, with its title and author's name, was certainly so posted. "It is as dangerous to read his name at a play door as a printed bill on a plague door." These words appear in Marston's play, "Histriomastic" (1598). When in the latter half of the seven-teenth century Davenant produced his "Siege of Rhodes," and for the first time a painted scene was used upon the stage, a label bearing the name of "Rhodes" was painted on the frieze. "Old Hieronimo," in the play within the play of "The Spanish Tragedy," directs the title to be hung up, and announces : "Our scene is Rhodes". But often the bill, posted upon the outer door, within the theatre, was not hung up about the stage, but carried by *Prologue*, or one of the players would come forward with it before the play began. Thus in Brome's "City Wit" Sarpago—who delivers the prologue—speaking of the play, says : "I that bear its title".

Acting in this country began about the twelfth century when vagrants, who amused the villagers with their tumbling feats, were paid to assist the trade guilds in the presentation of their religious plays, impersonating the imps and devils who were expected to be very nimble in their movements. In course of time the actors of interludes and moral plays became attached to some nobleman who maintained a musical establishment for the service of his chapel and thus became





part of his household. When not required by their master these players strolled the country, calling themselves servants of the magnate whose pay they took, and whose badge they wore. Thus Burbage's company first became known as "Lord Leicester's Servants," then as "Lord Strange's Men," afterwards as the "Lord Chamberlain's Men," and finally in the reign of King James as "The King's Servants". It is certain, however, that acting reached a high standard in the days of Burbage and Alleyn. The absence of theatrical machinery necessitated that dramatic poets should excel in their descriptive passages, and the actors' ability to impersonate stimulated literary genius to the creation of characters which the author knew beforehand would be finely and intelligently rendered. On all sides, the more we study its conditions, the better we perceive how workmanlike and businesslike a thing the drama was; it had nothing amateurish about it. For instance, we read how Elizabethan "old stagers" discussed a raw hand.

*Burbage.* Now, Will Kemp, if we can entertain these scholars at a low rate, it will be well; they have oftentime a good conceit in a part.

*Kemp.* It is true indeed, honest Dick; but the slaves are somewhat proud, and, besides, it is great sport in a part to see them ne'er speak in their walk, but at the end of the stage; just as though, in walking with a fellow, we should never speak but at a stile, a gate, or a ditch, where a man can go no farther. I was once at a comedy at Cambridge, and there I saw a parasite make faces and mouths of all sorts in this fashion.

*Burbage.* A little teaching will mend these faults.

The wardrobe of the playhouse formed indisputably its most costly possession; attention was so concentrated upon the actors that in their parts they were forced to be richly as well as appropriately attired; cloth of gold and of silver, and copper lace, were lavishly used. Thus we read:—

"Two hundred proud players jet in their silks." For, when not in their parts, the King's servants were allowed four yards of bastard scarlet for a cloak, and a quarter of a yard of velvet for the cape; the attendants of the stage wearing the blue coats of serving-

men ; the coat of the boys, whose duty it was to draw the curtains, set chairs and so forth, surviving with little modification in the dress of Christ's Hospital—the Bluecoat School. All bore the badge of their master in silver. From these, and from the audience, the actors in the costume of their parts stood out by glitter and magnificence, while spectacular effects were sometimes obtained by the display of a crowd of actors in brilliant costumes. Collier mentions that persons from twelve nations, owning the sway of the conqueror, came upon the stage, each being represented by two actors. Thus four and twenty persons seem to be required to represent the conquered nations, besides the characters in the play, also necessarily present. Crowds, too, with varying outcries, were introduced ; thus in an old stage direction we read : *Enter all the factions of noblemen, peasants, and citizens fighting. The ruder sort drive in the rest, and cry : " A sacke ! A sacke ! Havocke, havocke ! Burne the lawiers bookes ! Tear the silks out of the shops ! " In that confusion, the scholler escaping from among them, they all go out, and leave him upon the stage.*

Music there was, at all the houses, for incidental use in the play—the orchestra comprising viols, hautboys, flutes, horns, drums, and trumpets ; but evidently musical interludes breaking up the play were beneath the dignity of the "Globe," which maintained a high dramatic tone. Thus, Webster, in his induction to the "Malcontent" which he wrote on the transference of that play from the "Fortune" to the "Globe" in 1604, gives the following dialogue :—

*W. Sly.* What are your additions ?

*D. Burbage.* Sooth, not greatly needful ; only as your sallet to your great feast, to entertain a little more time, and to abridge the not received custom of music in our theatre.

However, the boys of the Chapel Royal, in their scarlet, sang at the representations at the Blackfriar's playhouse where a concert usually preceded the play.

The wealthy and fashionable spectators who went to the theatres to see and to be seen, sat on three-legged stools upon the stage. The tireman served out the stools, which were part of the furniture of the playhouse. Such gallants as were "spread upon the rushes" had



probably arrived after the supply of stools was exhausted, for it seems to have been first come first served throughout the house.

It was amid such surroundings as this that the Elizabethan drama arose and flourished. Attention was concentrated on the actor with whose movement, boldly defined against a simple background, nothing interfered. The stage on which they played was narrow, projecting into the yard, surrounded on all sides by spectators. Their action was thus brought into prominent relief, placed close before the eye, deprived of all perspective ; it acquired a special kind of realism, which the vast distance and manifold artifices of our modern theatres have now rendered unattainable. This was the realism of an actual event, at which the audience assisted, not the realism of a scene to which the audience is transported by the painter's skill, and in which the actor plays a somewhat subordinate part.

Here was a building so constructed that the remotest spectator was within a hearing distance conveying the faintest modulation of the performer's voice, at the same time that it demanded no inartistic effort in the more sonorous utterances.

The dramatist's freedom with time and place was justified by conditions which left all to the imagination. The mind in this way can contemplate the farthest land as easily as the most familiar objects ; nor need it dread to traverse the longest tract of years, or the widest expanse of space, in following the course of an action.

There can be no doubt that Shakespeare, in the composition of his plays, could not have contemplated the introduction of scenic accessories. It is fortunate this should have been one of the conditions of his work. He could the more readily use his rare gifts both as poet and dramatist. He knew that the attention of his public would not be distracted by outward decoration which he must have felt was of no real help to the playwright except to conceal a poverty of language or of invention, or want of ability to create character. Shakespeare's plea for the exercise of the spectator's imagination, as expressed in the opening chorus to " Henry V," condemns in principle the most perfect modern scenic representation. This is an opinion which is supported by many writers and among them the following :—

"It is a noble and just advantage that the things subjected to

understanding have of those which are objected to sense ; that the one are but momentary and merely taking ; the other impressing and lasting : 'else the glory of all these solemnities<sup>1</sup> had perished like a blaze, and gone out in the beholders' eyes, so short-lived are the bodies of things in comparison of their souls.'—BEN JONSON.

"Now for the difference between our Theatres and those of former times ; they were but plain and simple, with no other scenes nor decorations of the stage, but only old Tapestry, and the stage strewn with Rushes, whereas ours for cost and ornament are arrived at the height of Magnificence, but that which makes our stage the better, makes our Playes the worse, perhaps through striving now to make them the more for sight than hearing, whence that solid joy of the interior is lost, and that benefit which men formerly received from Playes, from which they seldom or never went away but far better and wiser than when they came."—RICHARD FLECKNOE, "Discourse of English Stage," 1660.

"Shakespeare's plays are said to afford a curious proof how needless are scenic decorations. We are asked what plays could more need the whole art of the decorator than those, with their constant interruptions and change of scene ; yet there was a time when the stages on which they were performed consisted of nothing but a curtain of poor coarse stuff, which, when it was drawn up, showed either the walls bare or else hung with matting or tapestry. Here was nothing for the imagination, nothing to assist the comprehension of the spectator, or to help the actor, and yet it is said that, notwithstanding, Shakespeare's plays were, at that time, more intelligible without scenery than they became afterwards with it."—LESSING.

"What makes Shakespeare's greatness is his equal excellence in every portion of his art—in style, in character, and in dramatic invention. No one has ever been more skilful in the playwright's craft. The interest begins at the first scene, it never slackens, and you cannot possibly put down the book before finishing it. . . . Hence it is that Shakespeare's pieces are so effective on the stage ; they were intended for it, and it is as acted plays that we must judge them. . . . They might succeed better still if the conditions of representation had not changed so much in the last century. We demand to-day a kind

<sup>1</sup> A masque at the Court of King James.

of scenic illusion to which Shakespeare's theatre does not lend itself."—M. EDMUND SCHERER.

"I also saw 'The Tempest,' with really magical scenery ; but, unfortunately, Shakespeare vanished in the enjoyment of the eye. One forgot the Poet in the wonderful decorations, and returned home as empty as if one had been viewing a panorama."—HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN to the GRAND DUKE OF WEIMAR, 9th August, 1857.

"The short space of time—from two hours to two hours and a half—in which an Elizabethan play was acted in Shakespeare's time, has excited much discussion among commentators. It can hardly be doubted that the dialogue, which often exceeds two thousand lines, was all spoken on the stage, for none of the dramatists wrote with a view to publication, and few of the plays were printed from the author's manuscript. This fact points to a skilled and rapid delivery on the part of the actor. Artists of the French school, whose voices are highly trained, and capable of a varied and subtle modulation, will run through a speech of fifty lines with the utmost ease and rapidity, and there is good reason to suppose that the blank verse of the Elizabethan dramatists was spoken 'trippingly on the tongue'. In the 'Stage Player's Complaynt,' a pamphlet that appeared in 1641, we find an actor making use of the expression : 'Oh, the times when my tongue have ranne as fast upon the Scœane as a Windebanks pen over the Ocean !' As the plays, moreover, were not divided into acts, no pause was necessary in the representation ; they were, besides, so constructed as to allow the opening of every scene to be spoken by characters who had not appeared in the close of the preceding one, this being done, presumably, to avoid unnecessary delay. So with an efficient elocution, and no 'waits,' the Elizabethan actors would have got through one-half of a play before our Victorian actors could cover a third."—"Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society."

In dramatic construction Shakespeare excelled all his contemporaries. With the management of the verse he was throughout his professional career making experiments, and only in his latest plays does it become a facile instrument for dramatic expression. But as regards the constructive form of the play he seems from the first to have preferred the method of continuity in vogue on the public stages to the more artificial plan of the classical play which consisted of five episodes,

more or less complete in themselves, with a chorus or dumb show between each of them. It is impossible that Shakespeare could have been ignorant of the existence of the Latin plays which were acted (sometimes in English) at the Universities and at the Inns of Court, but the internal evidence of the plays themselves shows that he was very sparing in the use of chorus, avoiding the dumb show and the unnecessary introduction of incidental music. Shakespeare wished the story of his plays to develop easily and rapidly from the opening to the crisis which was not reached until about two-thirds of the play had been written. And then came the catastrophe in the concluding incidents. An examination of the first collected edition of his plays, in the 1623 folio, confirms this view. Of the thirty-six plays which appear in that volume six of them have no divisions into acts and scenes, and of these six "Romeo and Juliet" is one of the earliest written plays, and "Antony and Cleopatra" is one of the latest. Ten of the plays are divided into acts but without any further divisions for scenes, and among these ten is "Titus Andronicus," a very early play, and "Coriolanus," a very late one. Twelve of the plays are irregular in their divisions; one has an act omitted altogether as in "The Taming of the Shrew"; some of the acts are divided into scenes, and not others, as in "Henry VI, Part I"; once the opening of the play is divided into acts and scenes and then the division is not further continued, as in "Hamlet". Out of the whole thirty-six plays in this first folio there are only eight in the volume which have the same divisions—in acts and scenes—that are in use for our printed editions to-day; and these eight include "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," together with "The Tempest," a comedy written twenty years later. Now it seems incredible that this wide divergence of treatment of divisions in Shakespeare's plays, collected under one cover, should have been accidentally overlooked by the editors, or sanctioned by the publishers without comment. The explanation would seem to be that the editors probably looked upon the inserted acts and scenes divisions as matters of little importance since they were aware that twenty-one of the plays had already appeared in print without them, many of which were still being acted at the "Globe," also, it may be presumed, without regular intervals. Then if the editors realized that the divisions they were adding to the plays in the folio failed to show the conclusion of definite incidents, or to mark the changes

of locality, they doubtless abandoned the task without attempting to complete it. This seems the only way to account for the meaningless confusion in which these divisions have been left in the volume.

For instance, to take the comedy of "Twelfth Night," one of the plays having its original divisions still retained on the modern stage, to its injury as drama. In the play the comic action culminates at the point where Sir Andrew, after the interrupted duel with Viola, runs off the stage by one of the stage-doors to immediately re-enter by another, and assaults her twin brother Sebastian to his own infinite discomfort. How out of place it was to insert an act division between Sir Andrew's exit and re-entrance seems to have struck the printer who, at the end of this act, omits the words *Finis Actus Tertius*, the only act out of the five which does not receive this indication of finality. In the "Midsummer Night's Dream" the printer again shows his ingenuity in escaping from difficulties. As the Elizabethan stage had no drop-curtain the conclusion of a scene or act was apparent to the spectator by the return of all the actors to the tiring-house. In the Dream play the division of Act III. leaves the pair of lovers asleep on the stage, and in order that the reader may not think the lovers have left the stage the words *They sleep all the Act* are inserted. Then when the play is continued in the next act and the direction *Exeunt* appears, the reader again is reminded that this does not apply to the sleepers, for the words *Sleepers Lye Still* precede the word *Exeunt*. In the earlier quarto editions, where act and scene divisions are not used, the stage directions about the sleepers do not appear; nor would they have been found in the prompt copies if the action of the play was continuous.

Some scholars are of opinion that "The Tempest" was written originally as a masque for performance at Court and not for the public theatre. But the play reads very much like Shakespeare's farewell contribution to the repertory of the King's players. The action is continuous, except that the dramatist for the first and only time leaves the stage empty between the fourth and fifth Acts, unless something has been omitted from the original text. The play has the appearance of having been printed from the author's own manuscript, and it no doubt was inserted in the folio by the editors as the first play among

the comedies because it was their latest acquisition from his hand. It is probable, too, that this was the only one of Shakespeare's plays which he himself divided into acts and scenes. Moreover, the stage directions are undoubtedly his own, and suggest that he was writing instructions for those whom he would not be able to personally rehearse on the stage. Whatever background may have been used in the way of a scene, either at the Court performances or at the Blackfriars, Shakespeare wrote "The Tempest," as he did all his other plays, without a hint that he visualized any scenic accessories as part of the representation. The men and women who take part in the performance, the costumes they wear, the properties they use, and the tapestried stage with its two doors, balcony, and alcove—these are the only adjuncts of which Shakespeare was cognisant in the writing of his plays.

The table on the opposite page shows unquestionably that Shakespeare's plays were written to be acted and not only to be read. If they do not act well on the modern stage it is because our actor-managers no longer understand how to present them. But it is difficult to believe that the plays would not recover their vitality in the theatre if they were produced on a stage similar to that of the Elizabethan period, when managers would be obliged to concentrate their attention on the characters and on the dialogue. To-day when it is asserted that a play of Shakespeare's has been given for 200 consecutive nights it means that it has been produced in the form of grand opera, and that while the claims of the author to just treatment have been entirely ignored those of the stage carpenter have been lavishly acknowledged and provided for.

At the same time it must be increasingly recognized that in English-speaking countries the legitimate art of the theatre is no longer considered necessary, and that classical plays are no longer wanted. Indeed they will soon cease altogether to appear in the theatre unless public opinion is aroused to the need for legislation in order to widen the use of the people's theatres by those who at present control them solely for the purpose of commercial speculation.

A CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARES PLAY'S, SHOWING WHERE THEY WERE ACTED IN LONDON, 1591—1642.

The "THEATER". Shoreditch.	Newington Butts. Lambeth.	The "Rose". Bankside.	Place of Representa- tion not known.	The "CURTAIN". Shoreditch.	The "GLOBE". Bankside.	The "GLOBE". Bankside.	Blackfriars' Playhouse.	At Court.	At Court.
Built 1576.  —		1592-1594.  —	1590-1596.  —	1596-1598.  —	1599-1613.  —	1599-1613.  —	1597-1609.  —	<i>For Queen Elizabeth.</i>	<i>For King Charles.</i>
		Jan. 23, 1593. Titus Andronicus (first performance).	Comedy of Errors.  Love's Labour's Lost.	Romeo and Juliet.  <i>Ben Jonson's Comedy, 'Every Man in his Humour' was acted in this theatre by Burbage's players, 1597-8.</i>	Henry V.  Much Ado About Nothing.	Revivals.  —	<i>Rented by the Children of the Chapel Royal who appeared, 1601, in Ben Jonson's Comedy, 'The Poetaster.'</i>	1594 Comedy of Errors. 1598 Love's Labour's Lost.	1633 Richard III. — Taming of Shrew.
1587-1589. <i>Thos. Kyd's (?) Old Play of Hamlet, and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus are mentioned as having been acted here sometime before 1596.</i>	Feb. 26, 1591. <i>Marlowe's Jew of Malta.</i>  —	Hen. VI. Part II. Hen. VI. Part III.	Two Gentlemen of Verona.  Midsummer-Night's Dream.	<i>All's Well That Ends Well.</i>	As You Like It.  Hamlet (final version).	Romeo and Juliet.  Richard II.	1599 Merry Wives (?) 1603 Midsummer-Night's Dream (?)	1634 Cymbeline. — Winter's Tale.	1637 Julius Cæsar.
	Mar. 3, 1591. Hen. VI. Part I. (first performance).	—	Merchant of Venice.	Hamlet (rewritten by Shakespeare).	Twelfth Night.  Julius Cæsar.	Richard III.  Henry IV. Part I.	1610-1642.  —	—	—
	—	Edward III. (Countess Episode).	The Taming of the Shrew.	Hen. IV. Part I.	Measure for Measure.  Othello.	Merry Wives.  Hamlet.	Burbage's players were now acting at the "Globe" and at the "Blackfriars."	<i>For King James.</i> 1604 Othello. — Merry Wives. — Measure for Measure.	—
	—	Sept. 25, 1601. <i>Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, with additions by Ben Jonson.</i>	Richard III.  King John.	Troilus & Cressida.	King Lear.  Macbeth.	Henry V.  1614-1642.	Revivals.	— Comedy of Errors.	—
	June 9, 1594. <i>Old Play of Hamlet (revised).</i>	—	Richard II.	Hen. IV. Part II.	Timon of Athens.	Romeo and Juliet.	Merchant of Venice.	1605 Love's Labour's Lost. — Henry V. — Merchant of Venice.	—
		—	Some of these plays may have been acted at the "Theater."	Merry Wives of Windsor.	Pericles.	Richard III.	Othello.	(twice).	—
		The Cross Keys, Inn Yard, Gracechurch Street.			Antony & Cleopatra.	Merchant of Venice.	Taming of Shrew.	1606 Lear. 1611 Tempest.	At the Inns of Court.
		1594.  Burbage, with his players, and Shakespeare acted here some part of this year.			Coriolanus.	Merry Wives.		— Winter's Tale.	1594. Comedy of Errors (in Gray's Inn Hall) (?)
					Cymbeline.	Henry V.		— Merry Wives.	1602. Twelfth Night (in Middle Temple Hall).
					Winter's Tale.	Hamlet.		— Othello.	
					Tempest.	Taming of Shrew.		— Julius Cæsar.	
						Othello.		1613 Hen. IV. Pt. I. — Much Ado.	
						King Lear.		1618 Twelfth Night. — Winter's Tale.	
						Pericles.		1622 Twelfth Night. 1624 Winter's Tale.	
								1625 Hen. IV. Pt. I.	

NOTE.—Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*, also Marlowe's *Faustus* and *Jew of Malta*, were the most popular plays in London when Shakespeare began writing for the Stage. The first time we hear of him is from the performance of *Hen. VI. Part I.* at Newington Butts. A year later his name is mentioned by Nash, the dramatist. There is no mention of the play *Edward III.* being acted at the Rose, but it was written about this time. *Romeo and Juliet* and Ben Jonson's *Comedy* were acted at the Curtain, and the other five plays were written at the period when Shakespeare's Company was there. The evidence for play-revivals at the Globe is found on the title-pages of the later editions of the quartos; this applies only to plays separately printed. The names of the plays acted at Court are taken from Cunningham's *Revels*, and copied from Mr. J. T. Murray's *English Dramatic Companies, 1558-1642*. It is quite possible that other plays by Shakespeare were acted at Court. Mr. Ernest Law states (1913) that the performances of the dramatist's plays in the royal palaces during his lifetime must have numbered upwards of one hundred. The 36 plays of Shakespeare, named in columns 2 to 6, inclusive, are arranged approximately in the order in which they were written.—W. POEL.





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